

# Community Involvement in School: Social Relationships in a Bedroom Community

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## Abstract

This qualitative case study describes how community involvement in school is influenced by the social relationships existing or lacking within a bedroom community. Thirty-five interviews with school council members, teachers, and community members highlighted that community involvement in school generated social connections between educators, parents, and community members, while the proximity of the city negatively influenced the community's social cohesion. Theoretically, enhancing the bonding and bridging forms of social capital fosters trust, which further increases levels of community involvement in school. An implication is that community involvement in school is a springboard for developing additional forms of community involvement in school.

*Keywords:* bedroom community, community involvement in school, social capital.

## Précis

Cette étude de cas qualitative visait à décrire comment la participation communautaire à l'école est associée aux rapports sociaux existant ou manquant dans une ville-dortoir. Des entrevues auprès de trente-cinq conseillers scolaires, enseignants et membres de la communauté ont révélé que les formes traditionnelles de participation communautaire à

l'école génèrent des liens entre les éducateurs et les membres de la communauté, tandis que la proximité de la ville affecte négativement la cohésion sociale de la communauté. En théorie, le capital social exclusif (*bonding*) et inclusif (*bridging*) favorisent la confiance, permettant ainsi la participation de la collectivité. Il en découle que les formes traditionnelles de participation communautaire à l'école sont des tremplins catalyseurs pour le développement d'autres formes de participation communautaire à l'école.

Especially these days, the roles and responsibilities of educators are extensive and dynamic. Teachers need to deliver ever-changing curricular content, stay up to date on student-centred pedagogy, implement diverse forms of student assessment, and incorporate technology into their classrooms. Simultaneously, educators must maintain a central focus on ensuring high levels of reading, writing, and math literacy among students. Undeniably, preparing students for the multifaceted lifestyles that exist beyond the walls of the school is a momentous task, one which becomes more manageable if shared with parents, community members, and local associations. Irrespective of location, infrastructure, funding, or socioeconomic status, all schools have myriad resources amassed within their local communities. Rich and relevant features of education become possible when educators welcome parents and community members to co-create supportive learning environments dedicated to intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual growth and success of students. It is under such assumptions that I present this research.

This paper describes how community involvement in school is influenced by the social relationships existing or lacking within a bedroom community. To do so, I define key terms used in the research and introduce the analytical framework of the study. Through the literature review, I describe the importance of community involvement in school, and I explain the dynamics of community involvement in both rural and urban school settings. I specify the research methodology and design employed for the study and present the thematic findings. I conclude with identifying implications stemming from the research.

## Key Terms and Analytical Framework

The word *community* invokes multiple connotations. Veeman, Ward, and Walker (2006) explained that there are political, geographical, cultural, and historical types of communities. Communities may be inclusive or exclusive; they may be associated with low or high socioeconomic classes and homogeneous or heterogeneous groups. However, for the purpose of this article, I define community based on the concepts of social bonding, geographic location, and the sharing of something. Specifically, for this research, a community is a group of people living in a particular place or region, where the people share common traits, values, knowledge, and activities embodied through such things as ethnicity, culture, language, religion, recreation, businesses/organizations, proximity, and lifestyle.

In further articulating the definitions used for this research, I define *community involvement* in school as any student-focused school–community connection that directly or indirectly supports the students’ physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. For me, this school–community connection includes parent involvement in school and extends to incorporate any collaboration with extended family members of students and with community agencies, businesses, associations, nonprofit organizations, municipalities, band or tribal councils, public health associations, or other community groups that promote education and societal well-being. Specific examples of community involvement in school include, but are not limited to, field trips, parent or community volunteers and guest speakers in school, parent or community member attendance at school-sponsored events, fundraising activities, service-learning activities, adult classes organized within the school, recreational activities associated with the school, student scholarships, donations to the school, community mentorship opportunities, charitable school events, visits to local museums, and cultural celebrations. Community resources that enhance community involvement in school include people, programs, businesses, activities, facilities, policies, finances, and local norms, beliefs, and attitudes—anything that can help promote student success (Epstein, 2011; Gregoric, 2013).

Another key term in need of clarification is *bedroom community*. Unlike the terms *rural* and *urban*, Statistics Canada does not have an official definition for bedroom community, and many academic printed dictionaries (e.g., *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary Unabridged*) do not acknowledge the term. However, a definition for bedroom community does appear online through *Dictionary.com* (2011): “A suburban area or town where many commuters live, often quite a distance from the place of employment; also called bedroom suburb, (UK dormitory town) [parentheses in original].” The term is also readily associated within literature pertaining to real estate, and it is commonly used by Canadian newspaper journalists (e.g., Bernhardt, 2007; Hope, 2002, 2009, 2011; Markusoff, 2010; McCormick, 2000; McNairn, 2002; Sankey, 2010; Switzer, 2010; Toneguzzi, 2006). Mindful of this limited information and of my research context, I define bedroom community as a neighbourhood, village, or town that is not officially within the jurisdiction of an urban centre, but where half or more of its residents regularly commute to an urban centre for personal, social, and employment reasons. While the relationships between an urban or rural community and its school have been researched (e.g., Corbett, 2007; Ralph, 2003; Snipes, Williams, & Petteruti, 2006), studies pertaining to the social connections within a

bedroom community and how these networks affect community involvement in a school are virtually nonexistent. Consequently, this research is unique. When taking into account that the populations of Canadian bedroom communities are increasing (Bernhardt, 2007; Bowden, 2009; Hope, 2009; Markusoff, 2009), any study conducted on bedroom communities is a significant addition to research literature on this topic.

Because concepts of community often pertain to the social bonds that exist between people (Bauman, 2004; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 2001; Putnam, 2000), this research was grounded within social capital theory, which also describes the dynamics of social networks (Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2007). Putnam (1995b) defined *social capital* as “features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (pp. 664–665). The most common forms of social capital are *bonding* and *bridging* social capital. Bonding social capital pertains to strong connections between family members and close friends (Fukuyama, 1996; Halpern, 2005). Communities demonstrating social cohesion and a cooperative mindset among their members fluidly share knowledge and display high levels of bonding social capital. Bridging social capital is identified by broader, more distant connections between people (Putnam, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 2000, 2007); it has the potential to unite people of differing cultures, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Bridging ties are often used to describe social relationships between people who possess contrasting social identities but share common interests or goals (Pelling & High, 2005), as reflected by business associates, personal acquaintances, and friends of friends (Hall, 2011). As these concepts are applied to this study, the successful promotion of community involvement in school closely aligns with the strength of bonding and bridging social capital that exists or is lacking between people living within a bedroom community.

## Literature Review

In what follows, I present reasons why community involvement in school is a popular topic in the realm of education. Also, I focus on rural and urban features of community involvement in school, because the bedroom community of my study had a rural population, yet most of the residents of the bedroom community regularly commuted to a city for employment and entertainment and displayed urban-like tendencies.

## **Importance of Community Involvement in School**

There are a variety of reasons why policy makers, scholars, educational leaders, and teachers emphasize the need for community involvement in school. Threaded throughout many educational policies is the notion that, independently, a school cannot supply all the conditions and resources that a student needs in order to flourish (e.g., AISI Education Partners, 2008; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Community involvement in school is a medium for augmenting and enhancing the social, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development of students. Some scholars view community involvement in school as a readily available resource needed to address challenging societal issues such as the increased number of students with special needs, the increased number of immigrant students, and the outcomes of discrimination and poverty experienced by many marginalized groups of people (Tymchak, 2001). Furthermore, research shows that parent and community involvement in school improves student achievement (Cox, 2005; Edwards, 2004; Epstein, 2011; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Community involvement in school has been associated with a reduction in negative student behaviours (Nettles, 1991) and an improvement in student attendance (Simon, 2001). A more positive parental attitude toward school can result from rich school–community partnerships (Sanders, Epstein, & Connors-Tadros, 1999; Sanders & Lewis, 2005). In his meta-analysis of community involvement in urban schools, Schutz (2006) summarized that educators have little hope for substantive change and reform in kindergarten to grade 12 classrooms without an increased focus on community participation.

Community involvement in school has additional benefits. Through service-learning, a method of learning that unites course content with community service or volunteerism, students attend to the local, social, and/or economic needs of the community (Gent, 2009; Kaiser-Drobney, 2011). Research suggests that when students participate in service-learning, they experience a heightened sense of civic awareness and duty (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2007; Melchior & Bailis, 2002; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Keilsmeier, 2000). Tolbert and Theobald (2006) claimed that authentic hands-on learning is produced when community issues are directly incorporated into classroom themes. Research also highlights that school–community partnerships positively influence the overall health, attitude, and behaviour of students (Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding, & Walberg, 2005).

As well, community involvement reflected through school–business partnerships such as scholarships and work experiences is linked to increased career opportunities for high school students (Foley, 2001). Through service-learning, community-based education, and school–community work experiences, bridging and bonding social capital is formed between the students and community members. In turn, possessing high levels of social capital is linked to employment opportunities and career options (Putnam, 2000; Halpern, 2005). In sum, as reflected within the literature, the student benefits of community involvement in school represent a mixture of academic, social, affective, and career rewards.

### **Community Involvement, Rural Schools, and Social Capital**

For several reasons, rural schools are ideally positioned to foster high levels of community involvement in school. Because of size and limited student enrolment, rural schools and their communities tend to be socially connected and socially cohesive (Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Mitchell, 2000; Parker, 2001), both of which encourage community involvement in school. Community involvement is also facilitated through a hospitable school environment. Rural parents are more likely to have contact with their child's school and to view school administration as approachable (Newton, 1993). Prater, Bermudez, and Owens (1997) reported that rural parents attend school-sponsored events more frequently than urban parents.

However, rural schools also face challenges when promoting community involvement in school. For example, rural communities tend not to promote as many culturally diverse events or have as many vocationally diverse role models, as compared to urban communities (Isernhagen, 2010). Additionally, rural schools tend to lack the infrastructure and human resources needed in developing assorted school–community partnerships (Minner & Hiles, 2005).

Compared to an urban community, small towns display higher amounts of bonding social capital but limited amounts of bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). In small towns, community members traditionally share a common culture and, because of location, the town's culture and homogeneous views tend to be insular and sheltered from outside influences. With that said, these days technological advancement vis-à-vis computers, the Internet, email, and cell phones has the potential to break down some of the geographical barriers and potentially increase levels of bridging social capital within even remote communities.

## **Community Involvement, Urban Schools, and Social Capital**

Because of location, urban schools are ideally positioned to take advantage of a diverse pool of educational resources. For example, urban schools have vast opportunities to establish partnerships with postsecondary institutes, businesses, and community associations (Snipes, Williams, & Petteruti, 2006). Urban educators often use these proximal resources to promote cultural awareness and antiracist education (Auerbach, 2009; Isaac & Tempesta, 2004). As well, due to proximity, urban teachers tend to take advantage of the wider variety of community field trip options available to them (Preston, 2012).

In a less favourable light, the larger urban student enrolment tends to promote less personalized relationships between urban educators and their students and student families. In turn, urban teachers and administrators tend to rely on formal policies and procedure when promoting community involvement in school. In such cases, community involvement in school has the potential to be a more complicated and less personalized process than that in rural schools (Preston, 2012).

As compared to a rural community, an urban populace displays more ethnic and employment diversity; thus, educators are ideally positioned to take advantage of bridging social capital. In other words, heterogeneity of perspectives, ethnicities, interests, and educational backgrounds yields rich prospects for the development of diverse school–community networks. On the other hand, compared to rural communities, people in cities attend fewer club meetings, attend church less frequently, are less likely to serve on committees, and are less likely to attend public meetings (Putnam, 2000).

## **Research Design and Background of Study**

For this qualitative case study (Stake, 2000), I utilized a constructivist orientation, which emphasizes that meaning emerges from the participants' and researcher's experiential and practical knowledge (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Collected over seven months, the primary data were 35 semistructured individual interviews conducted with 17 participants, who participated in one to three interviews. Five participants were School Community Council<sup>1</sup> (SCC) members, three participants were teachers, and nine participants were

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1 Within Saskatchewan, a School Community Council is an elected group of parents and community members that promotes parent and community involvement in school and advises the principal on school issues and policies.



community members. (See Table 1 for an overview of participant names and the groups they represent.) All participants lived in or around the community of Sunshine.<sup>2</sup> Fourteen participants were female, and three participants were male. The large number of female participants reflected the fact that every School Community Council member was female, and only female teachers volunteered to participate in the study. Participant ages ranged from about 18 to 70 years. About half of the participants had children enrolled in Sunshine School.

**Table 1:** Names and Represented Groups for Interview Participants

Name	Group	Name	Group
Ella	SCC	Alice	Community
June	SCC	Amy	Community
Lilly	SCC	Brittany	Community
Lynn	SCC	Cory	Community
Zoe	SCC	Crystal	Community
Name	Group	Kate	Community
Janelle	Teacher	Mark	Community
Meagan	Teacher	Ricky	Community
Tanya	Teacher	Tabitha	Community

In support of data credibility, after I transcribed the interviews, transcripts were returned to participants for a member check (Imman, Howard, & Hill, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and, as dictated by participant responses, alterations were made to the transcripts. From the member-checked data, I created a preliminary list of key ideas, commonalities, and differences, which converged to larger themes in response to the research purpose (Creswell, 2007).

To improve the trustworthiness of emergent themes, interview data were augmented by observational field notes (Angrosino, 2005; Stake, 2000), which I collected during attendance at three School Community Council meetings, 11 school and community visits, and a personal reflective journal I maintained during the data-collection process. Being present at SCC meetings allowed me to personally meet SCC members, listen to the

<sup>2</sup> For purposes of anonymity, throughout this article pseudonyms are used in place of actual person and place names.

content of meetings, and observe the manner and surroundings in which meetings took place. I witnessed how SCC members interacted before, during, and after meetings. The school and community visits were one to two hours each in length and included attending the school's Awards Night and Christmas Concert, attending a Parent Math Night sponsored by the SCC, attending the Community Fall Supper, having a picnic with my family in the school park, and driving the gravel roads surrounding the community. During these visits, I observed and documented the customs, surroundings, and socialization practices of the community and its members. Also, I maintained a reflective journal, in which I documented my thoughts and views shortly after each interview was completed. These augmented forms of data collection allowed me to triangulate (Heck, 2006) what participants said during the interviews with what I observed and documented while with community members or within the community.

During the time of the study, the Saskatchewan town of Sunshine had a population of fewer than 500 people, and, historically, it had an agricultural background. Residents within the greater community of Sunshine were predominantly White, middle-class citizens (Statistics Canada, 2009), and the general populace of Sunshine enjoyed a slightly higher salary as compared to the average resident of Saskatchewan. Sunshine School, a kindergarten to grade 12 school, had a student population of fewer than 400; the school employed about 35 staff members, most of whom did not live in the community. Sunshine was a bedroom community because it had a rural population, was located in a rural municipality, and exhibited many of the social propensities commonly associated with a rural community. For example, morning routines included community members socializing outside the local post office and in the local coffee shop. Yet many of the residents of Sunshine regularly commuted to and worked in the city; community members were knowledgeable about urban cultures and norms, mirroring characteristics of urbanites.

## **Research Findings**

Thematic analysis of data highlighted two key findings. First, participants believed that community involvement in school improved the relationships that existed throughout the school community. Second, participants explained that the proximity of the city deterred community involvement in school, because the city's influence negatively affected the social networking of community members.

## **School Activities Nourished Social Relationships in Community**

To assist in describing the association between community involvement in school and the social networks existing or lacking within a bedroom community, I asked participants to identify types of community involvement they deemed as important. In response, the first thing Cory talked about was fundraising. He said, “For a while, we used to have auction sales within the community for school events. Some of the high school kids used to go off on trips. . . . There was fundraising for these events. They were good things.” Ricky explained that having a community Bobcat driver, carpenter, or electrician volunteer to assist with school projects was an important feature of community involvement in school. June said:

Community involvement is what they had done on the track field. All of the volunteer labour, the donated materials, and the volunteer time that was used to build . . . the snack stand and a broadcasting tower for when they do track and field events and when they do football.

Tabitha and Janelle viewed parent and community attendance at school-sponsored events as a vital part of community involvement. Janelle noted that when parents volunteer to drive students to school sporting events, “they support their kids, and along the way they socialize with other parents.” Zoe believed an example of community involvement in school was when a parent asks a teacher, “Can you give me a list of your parent home phone numbers, because I would really like to help you with your calling when you need to coordinate a trip.” Interestingly, all of these examples of community involvement in school had a social and people-focused component threaded into them.

Participants explained that community involvement in school helped to establish and nourish social relationships by creating a welcoming space and atmosphere for community members. Tabitha said, “It would be beneficial for the school to host activities so that people in the community know they are welcome to come to the school . . . especially seniors.” Tanya said, “It should make them feel invited and welcomed; it is about making everyone feel they belong to the community. How can you have strong relationships, if you don’t feel welcome and comfortable?” Lilly reiterated a similar comment when she said that in order to promote community involvement, “you need to try to make things welcoming, easy, and as familiar as possible. It can’t be threatening. . . . Then they [the

parents] are comfortable.” Ricky indicated that community involvement pertained to parents and community members gathering for sporting events and Christmas concerts: “For the football games and for all the game finals, there were tremendous turnouts. . . . For Christmas concerts, you have to park down the service road because there are so many people who show up for that.” Thus, community involvement was facilitated by having both a hospitable place and a nonintimidating reason for community members to meet.

A number of participants believed that community involvement in school was associated with improved parental, school–community, and parent–teacher relationships. For example, Crystal talked about what happened when her grandmother volunteered at her school: “She was very in tune with the school. She knew all the moms. . . . She liked socializing with the other moms at school. They became her friends.” Alice perceived that community involvement in school enhanced parent–teacher relationships: “Community involvement shows our interest in the school—we like to see what the teachers do and show the teachers we like what they are doing. It shows we are working together.” Meagan indicated, “That community support, both personally and financially, is good. Just having [community members] recognize what goes on in here and support it is important. It builds relationships.” Tabitha talked about how community involvement creates a sense of pride in one’s community: “So supporting activities in a small community and in the school are helpful and feed the pride of the community. This sense of pride makes people want to work together to accomplish things.” Such comments reflected that community involvement strengthened the personal and professional relationships within the community, thereby enhancing social cohesion and collective pride.

Participants highlighted that the interests of children and students motivated many parents and community members to become involved in the school community. For example, Mark stated that the reason he got involved with a former school council was his own children: “We had children and, lo and behold, I found myself involved in the [school council]. I was president of that for several years. I guess that was part of watching what my kids were doing at school.” Participants explained how the interests of children connected many community members who would not normally come together. Janelle said, “You certainly get to meet other parents of kids in school through your own kids.” Tabitha, who lived a few kilometres outside of Sunshine, recognized that her children’s friends were the linchpin to having contact with other people in Sunshine: “I don’t really know the people in [Sunshine]. I find that right now the only way to get to know

those people is through my kids.” Brittany recognized how the athletic interests of her children inspired the creation of a new group of friends: “Our whole life revolved around [school] basketball, and because of that our friends changed. Those basketball kids and their parents were our unit all of a sudden.” These comments reflected that community involvement was about supporting the welfare of one’s own children; however, supporting one’s own children consequently fortified social networks between parents, too.

Alice, Cory, and Mark were three participants who did not have children in Sunshine School. All three participants indicated that children, in general, provided a reason for them to become involved with the local school. Alice explained, “If my friends’ children were involved or if my grandchildren were involved, I would go to various school events.” Cory also indicated that if contacted, he would still support the school community. “I got all kinds of stuff at those [school] fundraising sales, and I would still go to them. They may even still be on, but I never hear about them.” I asked Mark if he would be a guest speaker in a science class even though he did not have children attending the local school. His reply was, “I would be only too happy to help out with that sort of thing.” Thus, even those community members who did not have children attending the local school indicated they would still support the students at school and enhance their relationship with the school, if asked or if they were informed about school events.

### **Bedroom Community Status Limited Social Cohesion**

As mentioned above, community involvement in school held great potential to strengthen the social cohesion of the community; however, in many ways, Sunshine’s status as a bedroom community also limited the social cohesion of the community. I asked participants to describe their bedroom community and explain if and how their community’s features affected community involvement. Kate said, “If I live in a bedroom community, I come home from work, have my supper, watch a bit of TV, play a bit with my kids, and go to bed. I want things done for me.” Ricky reiterated similar concerns when he said, “As we know, [Sunshine] is a bedroom community. People have their nine-to-five jobs. They get home. They have their families and stuff, but that’s pretty well where it [community involvement] stops.” Zoe indicated most community members are busy commuting back and forth from the city; as a result, “they may not get home in time to coach that volleyball team. Then by the time six o’clock rolls around, and they get their family fed,

the day is done.” Cory described a bedroom community as “half a community.” Participants explained that the lure of the city’s abundant and varied resources predisposed many community members to spend their time, talent, and money in the city. June said, “One of those things about being a bedroom community is that you . . . can top up your grocery list or you can take in a movie any time you want.” Alice explained:

For so many people [in Sunshine], the city is their focus. The city is where they bring their kids for a lot of events. The city is where they work. The city is where they do their shopping and socializing. So I guess, in a sense, we don’t need each other as much as communities which are further away from the city.

Lilly agreed with Alice, saying, “The majority of their [community members’] waking hours are spent outside the community. Because they spend that time away, they are not making those social contacts within the community.” Brittany stated, “My realization is that this town must be too close to the city. That close distance causes our community not to have strong family-like connections.” In general, participants believed that the influence of the nearby city took many resources away from Sunshine, including some of the local community members’ time, money, and inclination to socialize with other people from Sunshine.

Participants also explained that the migration of city people into Sunshine was influencing their community’s social dynamics. Alice, who had lived in Sunshine for most of her life, described the town’s past status and how it changed. “We were a well-kept secret. Now it’s starting to grow, and we are not as close-knit as we used to be.” Ella talked about the mentality of new people who were coming to live in Sunshine. She said, “So I think people who have lived in the city for a long time . . . come to this small community, and they are used to locking everything up and keeping everything tight, not trusting your neighbour.” Mark believed Sunshine suffered from something he labelled as “The Saskatchewan Disease”:

The province of Saskatchewan was settled about 100 years ago by one million people. It is still one million people. . . . Many families have remained and consolidated and consolidated and consolidated. There has been very little moving into this province. So you have very deep roots in this province. You might say that the roots are strangling the development of the tree. I’d say that this town had

probably two or three families who control this town. It's not done malevolently. It just happens to be done that way, whether it's through the Council or whatever. That is maybe what is slowing things down.

Lynn described what it was like for her to move into a community where the majority of its members had generational roots: "It didn't matter how much volunteer time I put in. It didn't matter how many people I knew, or how much coffee I drank. We were outsiders." Such comments reflected social challenges that people appeared to face when moving into Sunshine, namely that established residents were resistant to revitalizing changes new residents might potentially bring to their community.

Participants went on to describe how, in particular, the city influenced Sunshine School. Alice noted, "Some kids who live in [the] community or in the area don't even attend school in [Sunshine]. They go to the city for school." Crystal indicated that the city's proximal resources were ideal for student field trips: "For field trips, the students in gym class were always able to go somewhere because the city was so close. . . . They were constantly going bowling, rock climbing, and snorkelling." The bedroom community status also had an influence on the activities and feelings of Sunshine's teachers. As Janelle highlighted, "Very few staff members live in the community." Meagan (a commuting teacher) expressed, "I really don't feel like I am a part of this community, so I am not very knowledgeable about the specifics of this community." Tanya (another commuting teacher) indicated that she did not know a lot about Sunshine's businesses and public facilities: "It's kind of cool to go to a small town café on your professional development days. . . . I had to go to the town hall to get a raffle licence. Otherwise, I probably wouldn't have [gone into the community]." Cory added:

Certainly one of the challenges is to have the professionals, like teachers, be more oriented to focusing their energy upon the community or even have them live in the community. There is a vast reservoir of talent there that communities like [Sunshine] don't or can't access . . . so that is one of the problems of being a bedroom community. The potential leaders of the community don't live in the community.

Thus, some community members and teachers recognized that commuting teachers did not tend to socially or financially invest in the interests of the local community. Furthermore, the bedroom community status of Sunshine School was cause for a loss of student enrolment; however, the proximity to the city allowed a greater choice in school field trips.

## Discussion

Participants explained that community involvement in school created a physical space and welcoming atmosphere for parents to interact with each other and with teachers. All participants regarded community involvement in school as important, because they believed these social activities helped develop parent–parent and parent–teacher relationships. This idea is mirrored by social capital theory, which states that high levels of trust are generated when people interact on a regular basis (Fukuyama, 1996; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Furman (2002) acknowledged that trust is “promoted through intimacy in small groups. The more the individual community member *knows* others . . . the more trust evolves” (p. 69). Hands (2009) stipulated that with regard to school–community partnerships, “trust grows through repeated interaction” (p. 53). Many scholars (Epstein, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2013; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2010) have also reported that in order to create and maintain effective school–community partnerships, trust must be imbued within those collaborative relationships.

Some participants indicated that utilizing the personal (bonding social capital) and professional (bridging social capital) skills of community members was a financially sound way to improve the school’s physical environment. In particular, they talked about the importance of fundraising, and, according to Putnam (2000), “fundraising typically means friend-raising” (p. 121). Both Putnam (2000) and Halpern (2005) believed that repeated social interactions with fellow citizens during a variety of community events reinforce and create stocks of social capital within a community. Having teachers, students, parents, and community members socialize during community events builds trust among members of the school community. When relationships are rooted in trust, people interact more effectively, honestly, and openly, generating higher levels of collaboration and communication (Putnam, 2000). Supporting community involvement in school creates social capital among school staff, parents, and community members, which, in turn, increases the collective responsibility citizens feel for each other and for their youth. The ultimate outcome of stronger, trustful relationships is that parents and community members work more effectively with teachers and administrators as, together, they promote community and student well-being.

Participants also identified specific features of Sunshine’s bedroom community that they believed were responsible for the perceived lack of social cohesion within



the community. Participants explained that, due to the nearness of the city and the convenience of its resources, many of Sunshine's residents were dependent upon the city for personal and professional reasons. Some participants and teachers recognized that commuting teachers were not overtly active within the community. Participants also explained that the professional jobs and commutes of many community members limited the amount of time parents and community members could give each other. In addition, some participants explained that the influx of new residents to Sunshine negatively influenced the customs of the community. As a result of these issues, Sunshine's populace did not appear to exploit the bonding and bridging social capital possessed by either its residents or its commuting teachers. When stocks of social capital remain inactive, teachers, parents, and community members are not as innovative, and communication between people is not as fluid. In turn, when stocks of social capital cannot accumulate, community involvement dwindles or fails to exist. Putnam (2000) claimed that time pressures, two-career families, and residential mobility are partially responsible for destroying social capital and deterring community involvement. According to participants, similar issues were negatively influencing the social cohesion of Sunshine's bedroom community.

However, the outside-of-the-community status of many teachers and the new members of the community also has the potential to improve the well-being of the school community via bridging social capital. Through bridging social capital, a school community can take advantage of the external knowledge, culture, and resources that other people possess. A school community with high levels of bridging social capital is more innovative and more resilient in times of change and/or distress (Auld, 2008). In order to empower the latent potential of bridging social capital, Sunshine's teachers, new community members, and established community members need to share experiences, communicate their professional knowledge, make use of their professional contacts, and trust each other. That is, in order to process raw bridging social capital into functional bridging social capital, teachers, parents, and community members need to interact, socialize, and nurture social ties. As noted previously, a logical way to foster these social capital bonds is through participating in various and comfortable forms of community involvement in school, where members of the school community can get to know each other and develop trust.

When participants were asked to describe valuable types of community involvement in school, answers included fundraising, volunteering at school, and attending school-sponsored events. Interestingly, participants neglected to list parents and

community members serving on school advisory or governance committees as an aspect of community involvement in school. Yet, throughout the past 15 years, Canadian educational policies have touted the importance of parents and community members becoming engaged with schools via school councils, curricular committees, and school boards (Preston, 2008). There appears to be a disconnect between what participants viewed as valuable forms of community involvement and what many educational policies present as important features of community involvement in school. Perhaps policy makers and educators need to build from what parents and community members perceive as valuable and nonthreatening aspects of community involvement in school. Expecting parents and community members to step forward and assume roles on school councils and curricular advisory boards, for example, may be a premature step in promoting community involvement in school. Instead, perhaps a more effective way to generate multiple forms of community involvement in school is to start by supplying parents and community members with greater opportunities to fundraise, volunteer, and attend school events and use these experiences as scaffolding to encourage greater parent and community involvement in other areas of education.

## **Conclusion**

The bedroom community of Sunshine displayed traits commonly associated with community involvement in both rural and urban schools. Consistent with the literature pertaining to rural schools, participants spoke to the social cohesion and community pride experienced by those parents and community members who had become involved with school. On the other hand, as with urban schools, the city provided a rich array of field trip options for teachers. Although it appeared that the community of Sunshine comprised an increasingly culturally and professionally diverse populace, these diverse forms of bridging capital did not appear to be utilized to augment curricular content or to create partnerships with postsecondary institutes, businesses, and various associations.

This study focused on one bedroom community and its community involvement in school. Further research needs to be conducted on the pedagogical and sociological aspects associated with bedroom communities and their schools. For example, what constructive aspects of bedroom communities can teachers utilize to augment their course

content and instructional pedagogy? What are the social and professional dynamics of parent councils that represent schools in bedroom communities? How does community involvement compare among elementary schools, high schools, and K–12 schools in bedroom communities? These questions are possible starting points for future research on the topic of bedroom community schools, research that is important to support the educational success and well-being of students in these communities.

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